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ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

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a NEW detective story by

JACK RITCHIE

Another Henry-and-Ralph murder investigation in the indefinable and inimitable Jack Ritchie manner. Who said the art of deduction (or should we call it the art of inference?) is dead in detective stories? Not while Henry Turnbuckle and his partner Ralph are on the scene of the crime. They pull deductions out of their heads the way magicians pull rabbits out of their hats . . .

NO WIDER THAN
A NICKEL

by JACK RITCHIE

I surveyed the stricken apartment. "The murderer was looking for something which was approximately the diameter of a nickel."

Ralph looked at me. "Now how do you know that, Henry? Everything's been torn apart. The sofa, the easy chair, the TV, the stereo, everything. Why did the murderer have to be looking for something the size of a nickel?"

We were in the victim's efficiency apartment, which consisted of one room, its Murphy bed, a cramped kitchenette, and a windowless bathroom.

The victim was, or had been, Everett Sharkey. Ralph—having once worked out of Burglary—recognized the body immediately.

Sharkey, who had expired at the age of approximately 45, had spent most of his adult life in prison, mainly for breaking and entering.

The cause of death, according to an informal on-the-spot diagnosis by our medical officer, had been a blow to the jaw suffi-

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ciently heavy so as to cause internal brain damage and fatal hemorrhaging.

Sharkey appeared to have been dead two or three hours. His body had been found by a paperboy who had come this Saturday morning to collect for his papers. The boy had pressed the buzzer, and when he received no answer, had—as most of us automatically do in like situations—tried the doorknob. The door had opened, he had seen the body, and run downstairs to the building superintendent.

I led Ralph back to the bathroom and picked up some of the remains of a broken aspirin bottle in the washbasin. "You will observe, Ralph, that this aspirin bottle has been deliberately broken. If the object for which the murderer was searching was larger than what would pass through the neck of this bottle, then why did he bother to break the container to delve behind its opaque exterior?"

Ralph agreed. "What do you think he was looking for, Henry? Microfilm containing the complete details of our nation's response in case of sneak atomic attack?"

"Ralph," I said, "did you know that the entire Old Testament has been put on a single piece of microfilm one-inch square? It is just a matter of a few more years before one will be able to buy the entire Congressional Library, including periodicals, all of it in a package the size of a matchbox. One simply slips the container into a projector, aims it at a wall or a ceiling, and has access to the printed wisdom and folly of the nation."

I examined the neck of the broken bottle. "You will notice that the cap of this bottle has been unscrewed and removed. This further indicates that whatever the murderer was looking for could possibly have been poured out of the bottle simply by removing its cover. However, our searcher also thought it pertinent to break the bottle, obviously to make certain that there was nothing still stuck in the dark depths of the container."

"This would indicate that while the object in question might have been inserted easily, it might not have been so easily withdrawn. From which I deduce that while the object had the diameter of a nickel, or less, it could have been a bit longer. And extremely valuable, of course, or why the devastating search and the murder? I rather suspect that it was a piece of jewelry. A precious stone."

"Why couldn't it have been microfilm?" Ralph asked.

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"Well, whatever it was, it wasn't in that bottle."

"Why not?"

We stepped out of the bathroom. Sharkey's body was now being removed. Our fingerprint men had departed earlier with what we fairly assumed might be the fingerprints of the murderer. They had been on almost every object, or shred of object, in the room.

"Ralph," I said, "you agree that our searcher went over this apartment and its contents thoroughly. Inch by inch?"

He agreed. "He took everything apart."

"Not quite everything, Ralph. You will notice that in the completeness of his search he smashed all the light bulbs in the apartment. With one exception. One of the *two* bulbs in the fixture over the kitchenette sink is still intact."

Ralph didn't see the point. "So?"

"He didn't break the remaining bulb because it was no longer necessary. He had just found the thing he was looking for inside the bulb beside it."

Ralph considered that. "*Inside* the bulb?"

"Yes, Ralph. The criminal mind has developed a method of detaching the bulb from its stem without causing the glass to shatter. An object may be hidden inside the frosted bulb and the parts are then glued back together. No traces of the operation are apparent to the naked eye—its only fault, of course, being that the bulb will never burn again."

Ralph and I went downstairs two flights of stairs to apartment 1, which was that occupied by the building superintendent. Like all 30 units in the three-story structure it too was an efficiency apartment.

The super, an elderly man, had been expecting to be questioned, and from the aura about him I suspected that he had spent the time fortifying himself with a few drinks.

"Now, sir," I said. "What can you tell us about your tenant, the late Everett Sharkey?"

He crunched and swallowed the last bits of a breath deodorizer. "Well, nothing much. I mean he was just another tenant. As long as they pay their rent on time, I leave them alone." He felt obliged to explain his duties. "I just keep the boilers going, vacuum the hall runners, and collect the rent for the corporation. It pays my rent and a little extra. It's not much of a job, but I get along fine."

"Did you ever speak to Sharkey?" Ralph asked.

"Just to say hello if we passed in the hall or I happened to be sitting outside on the steps on a warm night and he came or went."

"Then you don't know what his job was? Or if he had a job, for that matter?"

"I think he must have had some kind of night work. I'd see him in the daytime when he'd come downstairs to check his mailbox, but then he'd go back up again. I noticed he left the building nights a lot though."

"Have you ever seen him with anyone else? Man? Woman?"

"Not that I remember. He seemed to be pretty much of a loner."

"Did anybody ever visit him in his apartment?"

"I wouldn't know. Once anybody walks in the front door he's got thirty places to go to and I don't know which one it is unless I follow him and I don't."

When we finished questioning him, Ralph and I walked to our car. When we got to headquarters, we went to Sergeant Brannigan in the fingerprint department.

He had been waiting for us. "We didn't have any trouble tracking down the fingerprints. They're on file locally and they belong to a man named Alfred Brown Carpenter. He got out of stir just about the same time as Sharkey." Brannigan consulted the folder on his desk. "His specialty is also burglary. He's used three aliases so far. David Email Frazier, George Henna Ingerson, and the last time he was caught, John Khaki Larson."

Ralph cocked his head. "Khaki?"

I chuckled. "Don't you see, Ralph, criminals like to play little indirect games with the police. It bolsters their egos. Our suspect's real name is Albert *Brown* Carpenter. And, as you can see, in each of his aliases, he used a color as his middle name."

They stared at the folder and Brannigan said, "Henna and Khaki, I'll accept. But Email?"

"A sickly greenish blue of low saturation and medium brilliance."

Ralph rubbed his jaw. "I see something else too. His real name is Alfred Brown Carpenter. ABC. His first alias was David Email Frazier. DEF. His second, George Henna Ingerson. GHI. And the third, John Khaki Larson. JKL. In other words, he's going through the alphabet."

I acknowledged Ralph's acuity. "So this time Carpenter is probably using an alias with the monogram MNO?" I fetched the

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white-pages volume of our telephone book and found Sharkey's name, address, and telephone number listed. "Sharkey has occupied his apartment long enough to get his name in this book. I think it is fairly safe to assume that Carpenter also has a telephone. And given the hope that he too has remained in one spot long enough to be listed in the phone book, I think we may assume that his new alias is herein concealed behind the initials MNO."

Brannigan concurred. "Sure, but there must be thousands of MNO's."

I began paging. "There are thirty-four pages in this book containing last names beginning with the letter O. And on each page there are four columns containing approximately one hundred names each. Therefore we have approximately 13,600 people in our metropolitan area whose last names begin with the letter O."

I went to work with pen and paper. "And since the letter M is one-twenty-sixth of the alphabet, we would not be too far off to assume that approximately one-twenty-sixth of the first names of these people would begin with the letter M—which would give us, rounding off—about 500 people whose given names begin with the letter M and surnames with the letter O.

"Further utilizing the principle of one-twenty-sixth, we will find that only *twenty* of these 500 will also possess the middle initial N. And if we eliminate women and take into consideration that fact that half of the people in the phone book do not bother to list their middle initials—though I'm quite certain that Carpenter would, since he is so proud of his aliases—then I would not be at all surprised if we come up with no more than five people whose trio of initials are MNO."

I smiled. "Running a careful and patient finger down these thirty-four pages, I would estimate that it would take one person about three hours to check out the O's. Or two people, one and one-half hours. Or three, one hour. Or four—"

"I get the picture," Brannigan said. "I'll see how many bodies I can get working on it."

"Henry," Ralph said, "that was brilliant, but do you really expect Carpenter to be sitting in his apartment waiting for us to find and arrest him? He's probably halfway across the country by now."

"Very possibly, Ralph. However, you will recall that the cause of Sharkey's death was a single blow to the jaw and subsequent

slow internal cranial bleeding. Now if a man truly intended to kill another, wouldn't he choose a more efficient means? A gun, a knife, a heavy glass ashtray? A single blow to the jaw is very seldom lethal. Therefore, there exists a strong possibility that while Carpenter struck his partner, he does not know he killed him. When Carpenter left, Sharkey could very well have been still alive and breathing, although unconscious."

We left Brannigan and his men to begin their search of the phone book and continued on to the Robbery Division on the third floor.

I spoke to Sergeant Whitman. "Do you happen to have a jewel robbery in which at least one of the items stolen was a stone approximately the diameter of a nickel and perhaps a bit longer? And quite valuable?"

Whitman went to a filing cabinet and brought back a folder. "Here you are, Henry. Three weeks ago a diamond pendant was stolent from a Miss Vivian Patterson."

"Ah, yes," I said. "And the size of this stone?"

"It says here that it was a blue-white diamond, forty carats, and worth about eighty thousand dollars."

I nodded thoughtfully. "It might be just the thing I'm looking for. However, do you have anything else?"

"Not right now, Henry. High-class jewel robberies aren't all that common any more. This Patterson caper is the only thing we've got open. Only the diamond pendant was stolent. Nothing else as far as we know. It happened while this Vivian Patterson was on a crowded dance floor in her own home."

I grasped the picture immediately. "Someone surreptitiously snatched the pendant from her neck while she was preoccupied with dance and small talk and she didn't notice the loss until latter?"

"That's the way it looks, Henry. She lives with her parents in one of those big places on Lake Drive."

I wrote down the address, sent word to Sergeant Brannigan where he could find us, and then Ralph and I drove to the lake shore. We took the sweeping drive past the estates fronting the water until we found the Patterson entrance. Once past the gateposts, we followed the wood-bordered driveway and finally came to a stop in the oval before a mansion of heroic proportions.

A maid answered the door and led us to a waiting room and then disappeared.

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Five minutes later an auburn-haired, dark-eyed girl in her early twenties entered the room. "Sorry to keep you waiting. You are the police? Have you found my pendant yet?"

"No," I said. "However we are hot on the trail. We would like to go over everything which occurred on the night it was stolen."

"Again? Haven't you people gone over that all pretty thoroughly?"

"We are not from Robbery," I said. "We are Homicide. And we would like to hear for ourselves just what happened."

She was rather impressed. "How did homicide get into this?"

I smiled grimly. "We suspect a falling out among thieves. One of them is now dead."

"Oh? More than one person was involved in stealing my pendant?"

"It appears so. However, I am certain that we will have the surviving culprit in our custody within two hours, depending on how fast the men at headquarters can go through the O's in the phone book."

She studied me. "Two hours?"

"At the maximum. Now, please start at the beginning."

She nodded. "Okay. Well, it's called the Stele of Zevgolatio."

"What is?"

"The pendant. Or rather the stone itself. The diamond is flatish and rectangular, like a miniature tombstone. That accounts for the Stele. The Zevgolatio I've never been able to figure out."

"Ah, and this gem, possibly minus the chain, would just slip into an aspirin bottle?"

"I guess so. But why an aspirin bottle?"

I amended. "Actually it was not slipped into an aspirin bottle, though it could have been. Instead it was secreted inside an electric-light bulb."

She looked at Ralph. "Are you positive he works for the police department?"

Ralph looked out of a window. "Not only that, he outranks me."

She turned back to me. "Do you know who has my pendant now?"

"It is in the possession of a notorious breaking-and-entering man whose present initials are MNO. I haven't his exact address as yet." I rubbed my hands. "Now, I understand that this pendant was stolen some three weeks ago?"

"Yes. We were having a party. No special occasion. My parents

just like to give parties and I was dancing with Marvin Dotson, when suddenly he stared at my cleavage and said, "Vivian, weren't you wearing your pendant a little while ago?" And I looked and I wasn't any more."

I nodded understandingly. "So while you were dancing and conversing gaily someone removed the necklace from your person. Did you know all of your guests?"

"Probably about eighty percent. It wasn't that formal a party that you needed an invitation. We just phoned around and people promised to come and asked if they couldn't bring somebody."

"Did you dance with anyone who was a total stranger to you?"

"Probably a half dozen."

I smiled. "There it is. Either MNO snatched the Stele of Zevgolatio while you were actually dancing with him, or possibly while he was dancing with somebody else he managed to jostle you and took that golden moment to steal the pendant. How many people were at this party?"

"About a hundred and fifty or so. I know there was always some waiting to get into the bathrooms. We spilled all over the place. The terrace, the swimming pool. Matt and Nellie Estes even played tennis, but then they always drink too much."

"After you discovered that your pendant was missing, you called the police?"

"Not right away. I thought that somehow the chain had broken and it had dropped to the floor. So we started looking for it."

"You and Marvin?"

"That's the way it started, but in a little while everybody was helping us to look, but we couldn't find a trace of the Stele of Zevgolatio. Finally more and more of us came to the conclusion that it had been stolen. So Dad finally got on a chair and asked if anybody would mind dreadfully if we called the police. Nobody objected, so we did. I think everybody was really thrilled. Being questioned by the police, you know. Better than party games—well, at least most party games. Some of the guests were genuinely disappointed because the police wouldn't fingerprint them. They just took down names, asked a few questions, and that seemed to be that."

"Do you know if any of your guests slipped off before the police arrived?"

"I suppose some of them could have. But it seemed to me that all of them stayed for the fun."

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A maid came into the room. "There's a telephone call for a Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle."

Vivian indicated an extension phone on a side table and I picked it up.

It was Sergeant Brannigan. "Well, Henry, would you believe it, there are only four MNO's in the phone book, and three of them are women."

I laughed modestly. "As I predicted. And who is the man?"

"Merriweather Nile Olson."

"Nile? Ah, yes. As in green."

Brannigan gave me Olson's address and I put down the phone. "The noose is drawing ever tighter. Miss Patterson, you shall have your pendant shortly."

"You mentioned two hours?"

"And I shall be true to my word."

Ralph and I left her and drove to an east-side apartment building where we consulted the mailboxes in the foyer. We found a Merriweather Nile Olson listed for an apartment on the fourth floor.

We took the elevator up and pressed the buzzer beside door 417.

Our man, Alfred Brown Carpenter, currently Merriweather Nile Olson, opened the door. He was quite a hulking man in shirt sleeves, and a patch of surgical tape and gauze covered what appeared to be some damage to the side of his head.

A lifetime of experience seemed to make him instinctively suspect that we were the police and we quickly confirmed his suspicion.

He reluctantly allowed us into his apartment.

I came directly to the point. "Your partner Sharkey is dead."

His mouth dropped. "Sharkey dead?"

It was clear that Sharkey's death was a surprise to him. I pressed the attack. "There is no use denying it, Olson. You are responsible for his demise. That sneak blow to the jaw did it."

He blinked. "I didn't mean to kill him. Not on purpose. I just slugged him in self-defense."

I glanced about the room. Where would Olson hide the pendant? "Where is the Stele of Zevgolatio?"

He looked at me. "Huh?"

"It is called the Stele of Zevgolatio," I said. I spelled stele for him, but did not attempt Zevgolatio.

He looked at Ralph and shrugged.

"Very well," I said. "Since you are not ready to cooperate, then I am forced to find it myself and I have a fairly good idea of where you hid it."

I switched on the floor lamp. One of the bulbs appeared to be burned out. "Ah," I said, "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, eh?"

I turned to Ralph. "You will notice that this bulb appears to be burned out, and there is a very good reason for that." I unscrewed the bulb, grasped the stem in one hand and the glass in the other, and exerted force in opposite directions.

The bulb exploded in my hands.

There was a silence while I examined my fingers. A few small shards of glass, yes, but not deeply imbedded. I was able to brush them out without drawing more than a drop or two of blood. I cleared my throat. "He is more clever than I thought, Ralph. The pendant was not in that bulb." I glowered at Olson. "All right now, we've had enough of your nonsense. Where is it?"

Olson's mind still seemed befogged by the news of Sharkey's death. He reached absently into his shirt pocket and brought forth a small object. He handed it to Ralph.

I leaned forward. "What is that?"

"Microfilm," Ralph said.

The room seemed a bit warm. I stared aggressively at the small roll. "Actually, Ralph, that is *not* microfilm. Definitely *not* microfilm. Offhand, I would say that it is just an ordinary, general, run-of-the-mill strip of negative from a small camera."

Ralph took the rubber band off the roll and held the film up to the light.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "In the event of a threatened atomic attack the entire population of Milwaukee will be evacuated to Sheboygan."

I frowned. Sheboygan?

Ralph replaced the rubber band on the negatives and rubbed at his mouth for a few seconds. "Actually, Henry, I really couldn't make out a damn thing. What is supposed to be on this film, Olson?"

Olson shrugged. "I couldn't see anything either. All I know is that the film is worth five thousand bucks to somebody." He handed us a folded newspaper.

I read aloud the item in the Lost and Found section which had been encircled by ink.

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Would like to contact the gentleman or gentlemen who accidentally removed the statuette of the six-armed East Indian goddess from my residence on the night of the 22nd. Would like its return. Keep the other things. Four-figure reward.

No questions asked. 563-2740.

Olson began his story. "Two nights ago Sharkey and me pulled this little job in the suburbs. You know how it is, you take what you can turn over for a fast buck. You don't waste time with junk. But at the same time every once in a while, you see something that draws your interest, so you take it along just for the hell of it. And that's what Sharkey done with this statuette which has six arms and a ashtray built into its lap.

"We dropped off all of the stuff we accumulated at this garage we rent for just such purposes, and then I drove Sharkey to his apartment, him still holding on to the statuette.

"Well, in this morning's newspaper I saw that item. And I know it's referring to us, because how many East Indian goddesses with six arms disappear in a week?

"So this loser doesn't care about the TV set, the stereo, and the typewriters we took from his place, he just wants the statuette back and he's willing to pay four figures for it. But why? It's just a chalk thing and I never heard of no valuable antique with a ashtray in its lap.

"First I think, is this some kind of a trap? While I'm making the phone call, are the cops tracing the number? But on the other hand, this 'four figures' was tempting, so I went down to the railroad station where they got this bank of ten phones, and I called the number and also kept an eye out in case I suddenly saw cops.

"I made the connection and the man who answers tells me I can keep the TV and other stuff, all he's interested in is the statuette. And he'll give me one thousand bucks for it.

"Since I wasn't born yesterday, I know that there's got to be more to it—including money—than shows on the surface. So I tell him I want more money. We haggle and finally he won't go no higher than five thousand.

"So I take a chance and say 'Suppose I give you the statuette, but keep what I found *inside* it.'

"There's quiet on the line for a few seconds and then he says, 'You found the film?'

"Naturally I pick it up fast and say, 'That's right, I found the film. And I think it's worth more than five thousand dollars.'

"And he says, 'Maybe. But not to you. You wouldn't know where to peddle it. Five thousand is my limit. If I really have to, I can take the pictures again.'

"So I settle for the five thousand dollars and I'm supposed to meet him at four o'clock in the lobby of the main library downtown. I'll recognize him because he'll have a Smile button in his lapel.

"Well, I drive over to Sharkey's place, tell him about the newspaper item, and ask where's the statuette.

"He looks at me innocent and says, 'I tossed it down the incinerator. I thought it was just a bunch of junk.'

"But I seen that blue-eyed expression on him before and I know he's lying—especially when I look down at the wastepaper basket and there is one of those arms peeking out from under a crumpled newspaper.

"So I picked up the goddess and on the bottom I noticed this hole. It's empty now, but the film must have been in there and sealed over with plaster which was a slightly different color from the rest of the base."

Ralph interrupted. "Sharkey also saw the ad and wondered why the statuette would be worth four figures? He examined it and dug out the hole and found the film? Did he also call the phone number in the ad?"

"I don't think so—at least, not before I did or my contact would have mentioned it for sure. No, I think Sharkey wanted to find out how valuable the film really was before he did any dickering. He was probably going to get prints made, but in the meantime he decided to hide the film, just in case I got wise."

Olson sighed. "I could see that arguing with Sharkey wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I began taking the place apart, doing it slow and not making so much noise that the neighbors might call the police. Sharkey didn't like it, but he wasn't going to call the police to stop me either. I was just about ready to give up, when I thought about the light bulbs. And I was on the right track too because when I start breaking them, Sharkey comes at me with the statuette and breaks it over my head. In self-defense I had to slug him. But I thought he was just knocked out. When I found the film and left, he was still laying there and breathing."

Ralph and I took Olson to headquarters for booking. We turned the negatives over to the photograph department for processing and then drove downtown to the library, arriving there at 3:40.

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We began our wait for Olson's contact by inconspicuously studying a butterfly collection under glass in the vaulted lobby.

At five minutes to four Ralph dragged my attention from a Long-tailed Skipper (*Eudamus proteus*). "There's our man, just coming in the door."

He proved to be a thin worried-looking man wearing the Smile button in his left lapel.

Ralph and I approached him. "We are police officers," I said. "Are you 563-2740?"

He paled and seemed about to collapse.

I pressed on. "We have put together the whole sordid tale of the mysterious East Indian goddess, the concealed film, and Murder Two."

He swallowed. "Murder? I wouldn't have anything at all to do with anything that involves murder. I'm just an ordinary average spy."

A vision of Sheboygan flashed before my eyes, but then I pulled myself together. "We know all there is to know about this transaction—except for an insignificant interstice here and there. You might as well unburden yourself and tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It will go much easier for you if you do."

He was thoroughly rattled and ready to talk. "My name is Leander Morgan and my boss is Mr. Erickson, of Erickson Snowmobile. I infiltrated Hollister Snowmobile last March."

"Just one second," Ralph said. "Just what kind of a spy are you?"

Morgan blinked. "An industrial spy, of course. What else did you think?"

Ralph rubbed his neck. "Keep talking."

Morgan did. "As you know, snowmobiling has grown fantastically in the last few years. It is changing the face of the nation, especially in winter. Along with it, the competition between manufacturers for the market is becoming keener and keener and it certainly helps a company to know what its competitors are up to. That's why Mr. Erickson had me infiltrate Hollister Snowmobile, our bitterest rival in this area. I got a job as a draftsman, though I'm really an engineer and know what to look for."

"And the film?" Ralph asked.

"It contains the full plans for the new Hollister Sting Hornet coming out next year. It features a new torque reaction slide sus-

pension, a revolutionary fuel injection system, and a pull-out kidney belt. With that information Mr. Erickson will be ready to match Hollister's Sting Hornet when it begins coming off the assembly line."

We took Morgan down to headquarters, leaving it to the District Attorney's office to figure out whether there really was any law against industrial spying and if there was, did we have anything besides Morgan's confession—which he would probably repudiate as soon as Erickson Snowmobile got him a lawyer.

Ralph and I went upstairs to our desk, preparatory to checking out for the day.

The phone rang and I picked it up.

It was Vivian Patterson. "The two hours are up. Where is my Stele of Zevgolatio?"

I cleared my throat. "Unfortunately, through a set of fortuitous circumstances, I have not yet been able to recover it."

"But you took a sacred oath on your badge."

"I don't quite remember it that way."

"It was implied. Now the very least you can do to salvage the honor and word of the police department is to come over here and ask me more questions."

"But I am Homicide. Not Robbery. And the crime of murder has been disengaged from the disappearance of your pendant."

"I'll expect to see you in half an hour," she said, and hung up.

Ralph had, as is usual, been listening on the extension. "Henry, she's right. You can't just cruelly abandon the Stele of Zevgolatio."

"But I'm off-duty."

"Henry, a good policeman is not a clock watcher."

Ralph went home to his wife, children, and supper, while I drove to the Patterson mansion.

Vivian Patterson met me at the door, smiling.

I got immediately to business. "Now we know that you first noticed that the Stele of Zevgolatio was missing while you were on the dance floor. However, that might not be the spot at which it was stolen. When was the last time you remember still having it on?"

She gave it thought. "I was sitting in one of those chairs beside the swimming pool when Mavis Hutchinson oohed and aahed over it a little."

Vivian led me through the house and to the poolside tables,

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chairs, and umbrellas. "I was sitting right there."

I nodded. "Between the time when you are positive you had the pendant and the time when you first noticed it was missing, was there any incident, any diversion, which might have captured your attention and that of those about you so that the thief could snatch the necklace from your throat?"

"Well, Freddie Kaltenberg fell into the swimming pool. He can't swim, but it was no tragedy, because I could just reach over and pull him out."

"Ah," I said. "Mr. Kaltenberg fell into this pool and you bent over, offered him a hand, and pulled him up and out?"

"I know just what you're thinking. While I was pulling him out he snatched the Stele of Zevgolatio? But that's nonsense. Freddie's parents are Kaltenberg Breweries and he gets a fabulous allowance."

I stared down at the ten feet or more of water, but could make out nothing, refraction being what it is. "Do you have a pair of swimming trunks I could borrow?"

When I was properly attired for the water, I returned to the pool and jumped into it feet first at the point where Freddie Kaltenberg had fallen into the water.

I plunged to the bottom and almost immediately stepped on a stone and an exceedingly fine chain. I stooped, picked them up, and burst triumphantly to the surface with the Stele of Zevgolatio.

"Just as I suspected," I said. "While you were lending this Kaltenberg a life-saving hand, he, in his thrashing panic, somehow pulled the pendant from your throat and it dropped to the bottom of the pool unbeknown either to you or him." I handed her the pendant. "Madam, the case is closed."

She studied the stone and then me—equally it seemed. Then she moved to the edge of the pool and dropped the Stele of Zevgolatio back into the water at the point where I had recovered it.

I frowned. "Now, why did you do that?"

She smiled. "Actually this case is not closed. It is just beginning and Freddie is the thief."

I rubbed my jaw. "But with all that money, why would he want—"

"I've always suspected that Freddie is a closet kleptomaniac. His eyebrows join. Don't you see how fiendishly clever he's been?"

"No."

"First of all he created the diversion by deliberately falling into the pool practically at my side."

"But if he can't swim, didn't he risk drowning?"

"Bah. He couldn't possibly have drowned with all those people about and he craftily knew it. And while I was lending him a hand and sympathizing with his gasping for air, he chose that moment to snatch the pendant from my neck and let it drop to the bottom of the pool."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because to keep it on his person was too dangerous. If the police searched him, they would surely find it. No, the ideal place to hide the Stele of Zevgolatio was at the bottom of ten feet of wavy blue water where it was invisible. And so now Freddie is biding his time, and one day he will return to the scene of the crime, dive into the pool, and retrieve his loot."

"But if he can't swim, how could he dive into—"

"At this moment I just *know* that he's secretly learning how to swim. I'm psychic about things like that. What we've got to do is remain alert. On our toes. We've got to watch Freddie and this swimming pool whenever they are contiguous. We've got to catch this master jewel thief with the goods on his person."

So far Vivian's invited me to her home to watch Freddie twice and three times when he failed to show up.

I wonder if he suspects a trap?

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